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ABSTRACT

The origins and early history of a system of regional colleges in Israel are analyzed in the context of an emerging postsecondary system, based on the work of John Meyer and others who look at the institutional side of organization. It is argued that the terms used to define legitimacy, as well as who defines it, are crucial issues in the institutionalization of educational organization, especially colleges and universities. In such organizations, symbolism is more important than efficiency, and this is especially true when there is disagreement about the identity and definition of the organizations among resource providers. For years, the assumption among kibbutz members was that studying for itself was more important than gaining credentials and degrees, although the kibbutz sent members who showed special talents in the arts or who desired specialized education to institutions of higher education. The climate was right for the establishment of regional colleges with the kibbutz, the Ministry of Education, and local authorities. Almost from the beginning the regional colleges operated both as centers for continuing education and as university extension centers. When the first regional college opened in the mid-1960s, its leadership and management came almost exclusively from the kibbutzim. Developments that led to the withdrawal of full support from the kibbutz movement are traced. The regional colleges became intertwined with five separate major organizations, each of them highly institutionalized but without a strong basis for working together. (SW)

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SYMBOLISM AND SURVIVAL IN DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONS: REGIONAL COLLEGES IN ISRAEL[1]

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Thinking about the relations between organizations and environments has advanced considerably in the last decade. Within a year of one another, three important books in this area have appeared — Organizations and Environments by Howard Aldrich (1979), Environments and Organizations by Marshall W. Meyer and Associates (1978), and The External Control of Organizations by Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik (1978). Whether they take the perspective of resource-dependence (Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), ecology (Aldrich 1979; Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976) or institutionalized non-rationality (Meyer and Associates 1978), all of these works have in common the attempt to provide a more differentiated picture of "the environment" and a clearer specification of the effects of particular environmental characteristics on organizations than has been available until now. All emphasize the necessity of looking at these relationships longitudinally in a variety of institutional sectors, ideally across different historical periods in several societies. This is clearly a tall order. But at more modest levels, systematic and cumulative work is under way.

We will not review this work here; for a good start, the books cited above present original research on the organization-environment nexus or recast findings from other research in these terms. Research on organizations based on exchange theory (Blau 1964; Jacobs 1974; Levine and White 1961; Salancik and Pfeffer 1974; Talbert 1979) and on concepts derived from political economy (Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976; Benson 1975; Yuchtman and Seashore 1967; Zald 1970) are frequently impelled to examine relationships among organizations to understand what happens within organizations. Anthropologists who try to decipher the rules governing the definition and operation of boundaries among kinship groups, ethnic groups, and communities must attend to the effects of environmental relations on the identification and internal functioning of such groups

(Cohen 1969; Wallman 1977). Attempts to account for apparent nonrationalities in many modern organizations, especially highly institutionalized ones like schools and social service agencies, have looked increasingly at the connections between those organizations and other parts of the society to explain their origins, vicissitudes and survival (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Collins 1979; Larson 1977; Levin 1980; Meyer and Brown 1978; Wiley and Zald 1980).

This paper grows out of the latter corpus of work. Drawing on the work of John Meyer (Meyer 1970; Meyer and Rowan 1977), we look at the origins and early history of a system of regional colleges in Israel in terms of their institutionalization as legitimate members of a network of educational organizations. We will argue that the terms used to define legitimacy and who defines it are crucial issues in the institutionalization of educational organizations, particularly colleges and universities.

Institutionalized Organizations

Building on the insights of Weick (1976) and Cohen and March (1974) into the nonrationality and apparent inefficiency of organizations that are neither driven by markets nor produce clearly measurable outputs, John Meyer tries to clarify how such organizations survive and even thrive. First, such organizations engage in activities, such as the instruction of the young, the incarceration of criminals, the certification of professionals, or the treatment of the mentally and physically ill that touch on societal commitments that go beyond the particular operations of particular organizations. General conceptions and justifications are likely to be applied to and invoked by organizations of these sorts both to attract and maintain support. Over time, these conceptions and justifications come to be taken for granted; they become myths that "take on a rulelike status in thought and action" (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 341). Institutionalization is the process whereby those myths come

to define obligations and actions in particular circumstances. In modern societies, the prevailing myths for organizations provide definitions of rationality. Institutionalized rules define what organizational work — the production of certain products and services, the techniques whereby they are produced, the policies and programs which govern them — will be considered rational.

Institutionalized rules are to be sharply distinguished from actual behavior. Indeed, they often conflict with efficiency criteria; this leads to loose coupling between the institutionalized realm and actual day-to-day activities. In general, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organizations are likely to incorporate — indeed welcome — the practices and procedures of the institutional sector most relevant to them in order to enhance their legitimacy and to improve their prospects for survival. As a result, over time the formal structure of many organizations reflects their institutional environments more than the exigencies of markets, clients, and resources. As organizations' relations with their environments become more complex, bureaucratic structures and rules are likely to develop. These give the kind of legitimated rationality thought to be appropriate for controlling and standardizing organizational activities. There then appears an increasing isomorphism between organizations and their environments, as they come to reflect socially constructed definitions of rational practices. This is a long-term process, which depends in part on the degree to which an institutional structure has been elaborated to define organizational rationality. Once begun, however, the impact of institutional environments on organizations leads to certain fairly predictable outcomes.

Most importantly, the adoption of institutionally-defined elements "provides an account of its activities that protects the organization from having

its conduct questioned. The organization becomes, in a word, legitimate, and it uses its legitimacy to strengthen its support and secure its survival... (This enables) an organization to remain successful by social definition, buffering it from failure" (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 349). The aspects of organizations that most reflect institutional effects are (1) assessment criteria, which increasingly are defined in terms convincing to important groups in the environment, and (2) the link between performance and the acquisition of resources, which becomes increasingly loose as resources are provided on the basis of legitimacy rather than efficiency.

These forces do not necessarily proceed smoothly. Quite typically there are conflicts between the day-to-day activities of the organization and its efforts to conform to rules set by the institutionalized realm. There may be conflicts of another kind among those parts of the environment that hold up different rules of rationality. In response to such inconsistencies, institutionalized organizations are likely to incorporate all sorts of incompatible and conflicting elements. In such a situation, loose coupling among the elements is almost guaranteed. Yet work does get done in a relatively orderly way, mainly because support, based more on good faith and confidence than on systematic scrutiny, can be assumed.

The above account does not do justice to the subtlety of Meyer and Rowan's (1977) analysis of institutionalized organizations, but it provides a sufficiently detailed framework for this paper. The analysis here will extend that framework to issues raised but not pursued by Meyer and Rowan, who pay more attention to the functions and consequences of institutionalizing organizations than to the antecedents and processes whereby institutionalization occurs. These antecedents and processes may involve a good deal of inconsistency and even conflict between an organization and its environment and

among different parts of the environment. As they unfold over time, inconsistencies and conflicts may not necessarily be resolved, with important consequences not only for a particular organization but for the institutional sector as well.

Institutionalization Under Conditions of Conflict and Inconsistency

An exchange framework would argue that, when resource givers are dispersed, the resource receiver is less dependent than one which takes resources from few and highly concentrated resource givers (Jacobs 1974; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Dispersion, however, may lead to inconsistency in demands on the resource receiver and to conflict among the resource givers. In institutionalized sectors, more than in market sectors, such conflict is disruptive (Hall et al 1977). When resource givers make inconsistent demands on an organization in an institutionalized context, it will put much energy into coming to terms with those incompatible demands. This can take a variety of forms — playing off one group against another, providing information selectively to fit the demands of each one, or attending to the demands of each group sequentially (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Whether or not such a situation is problematic for an organization, rather than a source of independence, depends on (a) the degree to which it touches on institutionalized sectors, (b) the nature of the conflict among resource givers, and (c) the aspects of the organization that are affected by the conflict.

Organizations which operate in institutionalized sectors in which there is conflict among resource givers will find such conflict more problematic than market-driven organizations (Hall et al 1977). Institutionalized organizations which experience little conflict among resource givers will, paradoxically, have more freedom than those which confront much conflict. This is because, following Meyer and Rowan's (1977) argument, the basis for the

survival of institutionalized organizations lies precisely in the development of myths about their rightness and structures that exemplify those myths. When important outsiders disagree, it is difficult for organizations in institutionalized sectors to enunciate a myth and structure acceptable to all.

This is particularly true when the conflict among resource givers centers on the identity and definition of the organization. This means that one of the key issues in the institutionalization of an organization — legitimacy — is constantly being questioned (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975). Organizational boundaries will be fuzzy, activities and formal structures considered to be appropriate will shift, and even what the organization is to be called will be problematic (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Conflicts among resource givers will have a much more powerful impact on the institutional side of the organization — the symbols it uses to identify itself, the policies it enunciates, and the justifications it gives for its activities — than on day-to-day behavior.

General Characteristics of the Israeli Case

We will turn in a moment to the specific case of regaional colleges in Israel but first let us state its general characteristics. Figure 1 summarizes the general features of the Israeli case according to the characteristics of the focal organization, the resource system, and the relevant institutional context. By "focal organization" we mean the organization or organizations that are the recipients of resources and the targets of the attention of the institutional context. Characteristics of focal organizations include their number, their age, the dispersion among them, their policy-making bodies, the familiarity of their operations, and the extent to which their outputs are measurable and their operations market-driven. By "resource system" we include the certainty of resources for the focal organization, the number of resource givers, the dispersion among them, and dominance rela-

tions among them (Benson 1975). By "relevant institutional context" we mean the organizations that impinge most on the focal organization; these include resource givers as well as other organizations. Within the relevant institutional environment, we include the number of organizations, the degree to which they are institutionalized within the larger society, the formality of relationships among them, dominance relations among them, and the consistency among their views of the focal organization.

(Figure 1 about here.)

The case we are dealing with involves relatively new, dispersed and uninfluential focal organizations engaged in operations that are not market-driven, whose outputs are not easily measured. Furthermore, what they do is unfamiliar. Such a combination of attributes would seem to doom such organizations to early death or to require rapid institutionalization. Which outcome will occur depends on the nature of the resource system and the institutional context. In the case we are examining, the resources available to the focal organizations are relatively certain. There are several resource givers who are dispersed and no single one is dominant. Such a situation, while not completely stable, should assure the focal organization some freedom, depending on the nature of the institutional context. But it is here that the situation appears to be unstable: the focal organizations are faced with an institutional context composed of several different major organizations, each highly institutionalized within the larger society. As a set, however, the relationships among these organizations are relatively new and informal, with none clearly dominant. Most important of all, their views of the focal organizations are inconsistent.

Institutional Context: The Israeli Educational System[2]

The Israeli educational system consists of three layers: elementary,

secondary and postsecondary. In the early 1970s the system went through a process of transformation. Instead of 8 years of elementary education and 4 years of secondary education, the school system was divided into three layers: 6 years of elementary education, 3 years of lower secondary education and 3 years of upper secondary education. The purpose of the change was to improve the educational opportunities of underprivileged sectors of the population by expanding the period of secondary education.

Postsecondary education in Israel is divided into two sectors that differ sharply from each other in origins, age, financing, autonomy, and ideology. The university sector, consisting of seven universities — Hebrew University in Jerusalem; Tel Aviv and Bar-Ilan in Tel Aviv; the Technion and Haifa University in Haifa; Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba; and the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot — are older, more traditional, more autonomous, and more meritocratic than the non-university sector. The non-university sector, consisting of a potpourri of 185 specialized programs scattered throughout the nation, are relatively new, innovative, dependent on local needs, and egalitarian. Their enrollments are half that of the seven universities (27,287 students altogether in 1977-78 compared to 54, 060 in all the universities).[3]

Entrance to universities requires a certificate earned by passing a special matriculation examination; this requirement does not apply to most non-unviersity institutions. Most secondary students who acquire the matriculation certificate continue their studies, the large majority at universities. But not all students who attend secondary schools finish, nor do all those who finish get the matriculation certificate. In 1977, for example, about 40% of the twelfth grade students sat for the matriculation examination; of these, the percentage of students of Asian-African origins was much lower than those of European origins. This fact has led to a much smaller repre-

sentation of "Oriental" Jews in the universities. Non-university institutions, which do not require a matriculation certificate, enroll more Asian-African students (Israel Bureau of Statistics, 1973).

All of the universities receive the largest proportion of their budgets from the state. Until 1974, each university negotiated its allocation with the central treasury. Now, university budgets are determined by a central Planning and Grants committee established in 1974. In contrast, not all non-university institutions are state-supported; those that are receive their funds from the Ministry of Education.

The certification of universities and non-university institutions is also different. The Council for Higher Education, a quasi-governmental body dominated by academics from the universities, reviews the universities and any other institution offering the B.A. It has performed this role in a light-handed way and only recently has it taken on a few of the familiar trappings of a central body for higher education. Non-university institutions have been regulated even less. Hundreds of postsecondary programs were founded in the last fifteen years by religious institutions, the labor movement, political parties, and ad hoc interest groups. These programs are not required to meet any certification requirements unless they apply for state funds. In such a case, the Ministry of Education is responsible for reviewing them. The openness — almost anarchy — of Israeli postsecondary education has profoundly affected the institutionalization of the newest entrants to the field, the regional colleges.

Focal Organization: Origins of the Regional Colleges

The regional college as a form appeared on the Israeli postsecondary scene for the first time in the mid-1960s, just as postsecondary education as a whole was expanding in the nation. Housed originally in regional schools

run by the kibbutzim, adult education centers were established by the kibbutzim mainly to provide short courses in art and cultural subjects for their members.[4] Soon after, such courses were supplemented by others in technical subjects and, a little later, by courses taught by faculty from the universities which carried credit toward the B.A. At this point, the various courses were not sharply distinguished from one another, although it is clear that almost from the beginning the regional colleges operated both as centers for continuing education and as university extension centers.[5]

Why were the kibbutzim interested in starting the regional colleges? To answer this question, we must look to the history of the kibbutzim's ambivalent relationship with higher education (Gamson 1975). For years, the assumption among kibbutz members was that studying for itself was more important than gaining credentials and degrees. The conclusion that followed was that those with strong motivation would study on their own. A few exceptions were allowed, however. When there was a need for professional and technical manpower for enterprises in the kibbutz, such as engineers and teachers, and when people showed special talent in the arts, the kibbutz sent its members to institutions of higher learning. But on the whole, the kibbutz movement did not encourage large-scale participation in higher education, although many members in the founding generation had themselves received higher education in their countries of origin. This attitude was expressed in the fact that the kibbutzim until recently did not prepare their secondary school students for the matriculation examination, even though the curriculum of the kibbutz high schools was often more demanding than that of the typical Israeli high school.

During the 1960s, this stance proved to be unstable. An increasing number of the second generation became critical of their isolation from the larger

society. One of the reasons they often gave for wanting to move in a wider world was their desire for higher education (Rosner et al 1978). The kibbutz movement tried to find a solution that would satisfy the needs of the second generation while not radically altering the basic policy of the kibbutz movement toward higher education (Gamson forthcoming).

In order to respond to young people's interest in higher education and to meet the increasing need for educated manpower in the industrial enterprises that were being established, the kibbutz movement founded several programs during the 1960s: a special non-degree course to train managers at the Hebrew University's school in agricultural economics as well as new programs in their own schools for technicians, managers and teachers. After long and fruitless discussions about establishing their own kibbutz university, the kibbutzim began making arrangements with existing universities, the Ministry of Education and other educational agencies to provide greater access to postsecondary education for its members. The regional colleges represent an early effort in this direction. Like the idea of the kibbutz university, it was based on maintaining kibbutz control over the educational alternatives available to kibbutz members.

The climate for the establishment of regional colleges was especially favorable in Israel during the 1960s. In this period, the Ministry of Education was beginning to recognize that equalizing educational opportunity, especially for those of Asian-African origins, required more than providing the same educational resources for different groups in the population. Equal education also meant the provision of compensatory and enrichment programs so that students could take advantage of the new opportunities open to them (Horowitz 1980; Smilansky 1973). This principle applied to postsecondary education, since there were many secondary school graduates without the matriculation

certificate who could, therefore, not enter the universities. Here, kibbutz members and people from disadvantaged backgrounds shared an interest in broadening access to postsecondary education. In this, they received support from the highest officials in the Ministry of Education.

Local authorities also provided enthusiastic support for the regional colleges. In Israel, as in most developing countries, there is a problem of migration from the periphery to the cities. The central government tries to prevent this trend in a variety of ways through the provision of better housing, local employment opportunities, and educational services. Local authorities were particularly interested in offering educational programs which might attract and hold the populations in their regions.

The university system, in the meantime, was in the process of expansion during the 1960s. Between 1960 and 1972, enrollments in postsecondary education overall increased at annual rates of between 10% and 18%. The Hebrew University has without doubt been the preeminent university throughout the history of Israeli higher education, against which the newer universities are constantly being measured. Four of the seven universities which exist today did not become full-fledged universities until 1969: first Tel Aviv and Bar-Ilan, then Haifa, and most recently Ben-Gurion. Bar-Ilan, Tel Aviv and the Technion began to offer extension courses in various parts of the country in the 1960s. Around this period, there was an attempt to establish a university for the large labor movement, the Histadrut. Many other attempts were made to open postsecondary institutions in this period in the hope that they would be able to give regular academic degrees in the future. People in the Ministry of Education were also paying attention to developments in the United States that might provide alternatives in Israel, such as community colleges, adult programs and the like.

A Change in Kibbutz Support for the Regional Colleges: The Struggle Begins

When the first regional college opened in the mid-1960s, its leadership and management came almost exclusively from the kibbutzim. Four colleges were founded in a short period of time and three later. When they were first established, the colleges did not have an agreed-upon name. As each began to offer a range of courses, it began to be called "michlala," which in Hebrew is a general term for college. No body at that time was empowered to decide who could appropriate the term "michlala," nor was there a system in Israel for chartering and certifying such institutions. As Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasize, struggles over names are critical in the institutionalization of organizations. As we shall see, what to call the regional institutions has been a continuing struggle throughout their history.

Almost from the beginning, life was complicated for the colleges. While the kibbutzim, regional authorities and the Ministry of Education had a common interest in seeing the regional colleges provide postsecondary opportunities to local populations, whom whould be served and how they should be served needed to be worked out. Egalitarian ideals, however impressive in the abstract, can be implemented in a variety of ways. At the beginning, the heads of the regional colleges tilted more toward their kibbutz students than to the students from nearby agricultural villages and towns.

Funding for the colleges was worked out in a fairly reliable way, with about one-third of their income coming from the regional councils, about one-half from the Ministry of Education, and the remainder from student fees and from other ministries for special programs. But just as the Ministry of Education and the regional authorities began to accept the regional colleges as institutions which would help realize their social policies, the kibbutzim began to lose interest in them. The decline in kibbutz interest was expressed mostly in

attitudes rather than in the provision of students and administrative staff, which continued to be important to the regional colleges. Rather, the kibbutz no longer saw the colleges as offering significant solutions to the large-scale problems of postsecondary education for its members. The colleges were no longer seen as attractive to young kibbutz members, who found it difficult to attend the colleges after a day's work, did not find the intellectual atmosphere challenging enough, and saw them as considerably less prestigious than the universities.

Kibbutz young people were more in touch with the realities of Israeli society, in which an expanding economy, Westernization, and industrial development in the 1960s had enhanced the importance of educational credentials, than the older generation of kibbutz leaders who still held onto notions of studying for its own sake. While the regional colleges had begun to offer courses which carried credit toward the B.A., these were not enough to hold kibbutz young people. In addition, the colleges could not provide training in the scientific and technical subjects necessary to the central functioning of the kibbutzim. So while their elders were taking cultural courses down the road, young kibbutz members were more likely to be going to a university across the country (Rosner et al 1978).

With the withdrawal of full support from the kibbutz movement, the kibbutz members who staffed the regional colleges found themselves without an independent political base or a clear basis for legitimacy. On the one hand, they shared with regional authorities and the Ministry of Education an egalitarian ideal for the regional colleges. On the other hand, their own comrades on the kibbutz no longer saw the regional institutions as the way to increase educational opportunities for their young people. Eventually, the regional colleges might have become institutionalized, as community colleges

have in this country, with a myth of legitimacy based on responsiveness to local needs and equal opportunity (Carnegie Commission 1970). In the Israeli context, which had no such conception of postsecondary education, such a myth would have taken a long time to become rooted in the regional colleges.

Operationally, the situation was otherwise. From the beginning, the colleges offered courses that were very responsive to interests in the local populations. They provided instruction to people who could not have studied elsewhere: adults of Asian-African backgrounds, many of them poor and uneducated. People who would not ordinarily spend much time together — a Moroccan manual laborer, a Russian-born kibbutz member, Israeli Arabs — studied together in the same classroom. Most of these people were taking non-academic cultural and technical courses; at most, one-fifth of the students were enrolled in academic courses for credit.

Funding for the regional colleges was relatively assured and the day-to-day operations could proceed smoothly. A rich and varied menu of courses was assembled several times a year, teachers from around the country were lined up, word was gotten out to the towns and villages in the region, students were transported to classes after work, registration and advising were accomplished, and even amenities like coffee and a social room were laid on.

But life at the colleges at this level was divorced from what went on at the institutional level. Just as the kibbutzim withdrew from the regional colleges, the Ministry of Education attempted to exert some control over the various new programs in postsecondary education started in the 1960s. For the first time in the history of the regional colleges, the universities and the Council for Higher Education were brought onto the scene officially. These developments had fateful consequences for the regional colleges, which found themselves intertwined with five separate major organizations on a reg-

ular basis, each of them highly institutionalized in its own right but without a strong basis for working together: the Ministry of Education, regional authorities, the kibbutzim, the universities, and the Council for Higher Education.

The Regional Colleges Confront the Institutional Context

With the appointment of the Lifson Committee by the Ministry of Education, the regional colleges became part of an emerging postsecondary system in Israel. This committee, chaired by a respected professor of physics from the Weizmann Institute, was charged with the task of surveying postsecondary education in Israel for the first time and of proposing principles for its development in the future. Composed of eight members besides Lifson, all of them eminent professors from Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University, the committee reported to the Council for Higher Education in 1971 and recommended that the future development of postsecondary education be based on the following principles: (1) expanding, deepening, and partly academicizing postsecondary institutions, (2) increasing the pool of postsecondary education students, (3) dispersing the learning population, (4) introducing new technologies in education, (5) developing a national policy for the implementation of these principles. The committee suggested some devices to carry out the policy. A network of regional colleges, with academic courses to be offered toward the B.A., should be recognized by the existing universities. Adult education courses without degree implications would be offered alongside the proposed academic courses. The Lifson Committee also proposed that single-focus institutions, such as teachers' training colleges and technological schools, be expanded into comprehensive institutions. Accreditation for such colleges was recommended by the committee, although it did not specify how this was to be accomplished. The committee also recommended the establishment of an

experimental open university modelled on that of Great Britain's. Finally, the Lifson Committee recommended that a central body coordinate all of the regional colleges.

The Lifson Committee represented the first legitimation from the academic establishment of an egalitarian conception of postsecondary education in Israel. In effect, it laid out a blueprint for the development of a system of post-secondary education that would exist alongside but not directly challenge the university system. Heads of the regional colleges, basking in the glow of such unaccustomed attention, circulated a document to influential people on the postsecondary education scene which asserted that the Lifson Committee's idea of a network of regional colleges was compatible with their aims. They pointed out that there could be two models of university sponsorship. The first, an extension model, would give student status in the universities to students enrolled in the regional colleges. The second, a transfer model, would provide academic courses in the regional colleges, which universities would recognize as worthy of academic credit. They suggested that there be even further development of the regional colleges beyond what the committee had recommended. At the beginning, there would be academic courses awarding university credit. In an intermediate stage, the colleges would award an Associate of Arts degree. In the final stage of development, the Council for Higher Education would authorize the colleges to award academic degrees on their own.

These proposals from the college heads turned out to be too optimistic, for the ensuing years would bring the various organizations in the institutional context of postsecondary education into direct conflict about what the colleges should be. These conflicts centered almost exclusively on whether and how they should provide academic credit for their courses.

Attempts to Institutionalize Postsecondary Education in Israel and Implications for the Regional Colleges

1972 was a crucial year in the development of postsecondary policy in Israel. The rate of growth in enrollments was just beginning to decline. In that year, the 1958 law establishing the Council for Higher Education was amended to empower the Council, and only the Council, with licensing authority for institutions of postsecondary education. Until then, as we have noted, such an authority did not exist in Israel. It was under those looser conditions that the regional colleges were established and called colleges. The 1972 law said, in effect, that only institutions licensed by the Council for Higher Education could award credit toward the B.A. The question was whether the regional colleges would be licensed. To address this question, another committee, the Central Committee recommended by the Lifson Committee the year before, was appointed to look into licensing postsecondary institutions, including teachers' training colleges, technical colleges, and regional colleges.

Yet another committee, the Porat Committee, was appointed by the Council for Higher Education to examine the same question. Headed by a high official of the Ministry of Education, this committee concluded that it could not deal with the complicated questions raised by the variety of postsecondary institutions it was asked to license, and it asked to be disbanded. The Central Committee was given the task, relinquished by the Porat Committee, of deciding which of the colleges should be licensed. With thirty members from the universities, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labor, industry, the kibbutz movement, and the labor movement the Central Committee could not agree on the criteria which should govern the licensing of postsecondary institutions. The various interests represented on the committee, combined with the lack of experience with education on the part of some, insured that the

university people would dominate the deliberations. After a year of arguing, the committee was dispersed.

At this point, the Council for Higher Education summarized its own internal discussions of the colleges in a major document issued in 1975. This document reflects an emerging consensus on the Council about postsecondary education that can be traced to the almost continuous attention that had been given to the regional colleges in the previous five years. It recommended that no new university be established in Israel and that there be a distinction made between a "college" and an "authorized college." Only authorized colleges could award a B.A. or academic credits. Colleges could be authorized if they provided special training unavailable at the universities, as for teachers, or if they served populations that did not have access to other postsecondary institutions. Graduates of authorized colleges could continue studying for advanced degrees but the colleges themselves could not give advanced degrees. New courses would have to be approved by the Council for Higher Education, which additionally urged that the colleges have their own full-time teaching staffs rather than relying on university faculty "moonlighting" on top of their regular loads.

It is clear that the Council was searching for a justification for licensing at least some of the colleges that already existed, while preventing the proliferation of new ones.[6] Despite the fact that it represented the interests of the universities more than any other organization in postsecondary education, the Council did not entirely please the universities with this document. The universities were far from enthusiastic about the authorization of a new brand of "inferior" academic institution. They pointed to the fact that the university student population in Israel as a percentage of the total population was among the highest in the world. They argued that

there were enough educational opportunities available for those who merited them, since in the 1960s all of the universities had introduced "pre-academic" courses to help those without a matriculation certificate get into the universities. It made little sense, they argued, to freeze the number of universities while at the same time accrediting colleges to offer B.A. degrees at lower standards.

Whatever the outcome of the discussion at this stage, it was clear that the regional colleges, to be accredited, would receive a kind of scrutiny over their academic programs which they had never experienced. Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that this is a sure sign of weakness in institutionalized organizations. Yet another committee was appointed by the Council for Higher Education, this time in 1977, again to examine the question of accrediting the colleges. The Poliakov Committee, with fifteen members drawn from the universities, the Council for Higher Education, the national labor federation, and the national student union, agreed that the regional colleges could not be independent institutions of higher education as they existed but they differed on how to change the situation. The majority of the members — twelve out of fifteen — recommended that the colleges take the necessary steps to become authorized colleges with their own faculty and curriculum. Three of the fifteen committee members recommended that the regional colleges instead institutionalize their university sponsorship under an extension model.

The arguments invoked by the two positions, virtually indistinguishable in policy terms, were based on costs and practical matters. Those who argued for the accreditation of the regional colleges pointed to their presumed lower cost of instruction, the new job opportunities they would open for young academics, and the innovative nature of the regional college structure. Those arguing for the extension model pointed out that the regional colleges did

not have sufficient staff and broad enough programs to become full-fledged colleges.

The recommendation of the majority on the Poliakov Committee was never implemented, partly because of pressure from the universities and partly because the leaders of the regional colleges themselves began to doubt their ability to mobilize the resources to establish the colleges as independent institutions without the support of the kibutz movement. In a shift from their goal of independent status during the euphoric early 1970s when the Lifson Committee issued its expansionary recommendations for postsecondary education, the regional colleges were now in favor of an extension model. In effect, the regional colleges opted to institutionalize their relationships with the universities.

Why did they take this position, one which most students of organizations would find problematic, particularly in view of the fact that their budgets were virtually guaranteed? We would argue, following the institutional perspective, that the issue of academic status for the regional colleges was a symbolic issue. For the heads of the regional colleges, establishing an identity and securing legitimacy were the key problems thoughout the existence of the regional colleges and particularly after kibbutz support weakened. Since there was no official national policy to equalize postsecondary education — despite the advocacy of the Ministry of Education and regional authorities — the regional colleges could not establish their legitimacy by invoking that conception.

Who provided legitimacy in Israeli higher education? Clearly it was not the Ministry of Education and regional authorities, but the universities and the Council for Higher Education. The matter of legitimacy became particularly problematic for the regional colleges at the time of the Poliakov

Committee because of potential competition from Everyman's University. Embodying one of the recommendations of the Lifson Committee, Everyman's University opened in 1977 with a substantial grant from the Rothschild Foundation. It drew much attention with its TV courses modelled after those of Great Britain's Open University. Three years after its founding, the university received full accreditation from the Council for Higher Education to offer the B.A. on its own. While several of the regional colleges rented space to the new university for its learning centers, few of the students enrolled in the regional colleges signed up for Everyman's University because of the difficulty and sophistication of the materials. Yet opponents of the regional colleges used the existence of Everyman's University to argue that it provided academic opportunities to adults in the hinterland.

Partial Institutionalization, Partial Legitimacy

Why did arguments about the regional colleges throughout this period focus on academic credit and the B.A.? Certainly not because of the numbers of students involved: on the average across all of the regional colleges, at most 20% of the enrolled students took courses for academic creidt. Most these older students were already established in their work, so academic credit was not linked to certification for jobs. In fact, students who used regional colleges to further themselves in work were less likely to enroll in academic courses than in technical or continuing education courses because their certification was controlled by the Ministry of Labor or the Ministry of Welfare.

It is precisely because the problems facing the regional colleges had more to do with legitimacy than with their daily operations or enrollment pattern that academic credit became a critical issue. The universities in Israel, like universities everywhere, justify themselves and judge others in terms of standards which can only be judged by academics. The currency

of academic standards is credits and grades. Control over that currency is a serious matter for academics. It was much less important to the universities and the Council for Higher Education what standards were being invoked in continuing education courses, for these did not involve granting credits. If the regional colleges wished to gain legitimacy as academically respectable institutions in Israeli terms, they would have to offer bona fides for the academic credits they granted. When it became clear that accreditation as independent colleges would be a struggle at best, especially with the entry of Everyman's University, the heads of the regional colleges tried to work out a modus vivendi with the universities that permitted them to offer academic credit as they had been doing all along — as extensions of the universities.

The connection with the universities was sufficiently powerful that the colleges came under the scrutiny of those on the other side of the argument, the Ministry of Education and the regional authorities. One indication of this concern was the appointment in 1978 of a special staff member in the Ministry of Education to deal with the regional colleges. In 1978, the Council for Higher Education appointed yet another committee to look into the issue of the regional colleges. The Meyer Committee, chaired by another respected university professor, included the usual group of university people but this time it also had one of the most influential directors representing the regional colleges. The committee asserted unequivocally that the regional colleges were "conservative" institutions with no ambition to become independent. They were not, therefore, a threat to the universities. Given this fact, the academic curriculum should be modified to reflect the needs of the regions rather than remaining carbon copies of university courses, as they had been all along. The Meyer Committee suggested, further, that Everyman's University

be more closely integrated with the regional colleges. More important institutionally, it recommended that academic credit granted through extension courses taught in the regional colleges be made more systematic. It urged that the universities recognize each other's credits when they were given in courses taught within the regional colleges. The committee approved the principle, in operation for a long time, that students in the regional colleges be permitted to earn up to two of the three years required for the B.A. in Israeli universities. The committee also recommended that courses offered through the regional colleges be concentrated in a limited number of areas to provide more coherence and that a permanent Meyer Committee approve new courses. Finally, it urged that a central academic committee for all of the regional colleges be established.

The Meyer Committee became a permanent committee of the Council for Higher Education. It was divided into two subcommittees, one to deal with academic courses and budgets and the other with non-academic courses. Professor Meyer, a representative from the regional colleges, a representative from the universities, and a division head from the Ministry of Education comprised the academic committee. The non-academic committee consisted of two representatives from the regional colleges, one from a regional council, and two from the Ministry of Education. These committees were carefully designed to balance the interests of all of the organizations involved with the regional colleges. The non-academic courses became part of a formal structure and the regional colleges had their own representatives on the key committees. At this writing, these committees provide a formal step in the institutionalization of the regional colleges.

But the regional colleges have lost ground in the institutionalization of postsecondary education overall in Israel. In 1977, the legal basis for

the relationship between the Council for Higher Education and the regional colleges was abolished. An amendment that year to the Council for Higher Education law dropped the term "college" from its jurisdiction. No longer would "college" be a protected term carrying the assumption of academic status, for it would not be accredited by the body authorized to do so. To the seven established universities, nine specialized colleges and Everyman's University were added to the jurisdiction of the Council for Higher Education. The regional colleges were not. Their connection to the Council and to the world of academic credits and degrees came through their extension arrangements with sponsoring universities.

The regional colleges have not yet found an identity which might balance their two sides. In the context of Israel, perhaps this is unnecessary or even undesirable. Indeed, the academic courses can be seen as providing a "cover" for the real work of these colleges: the provision of new opportunities for the under-prepared adults located in areas poorly served by universities. That a small number of the adults in these areas are enrolled in academic courses in institutionally relevant. They are needed to provide academic legitimacy to the colleges and their leaders.

Summary: The Institutional Context as a Focus

The process which characterized the institutionalization of the regional colleges cannot be separated from the institutionalization of postsecondary education as a whole in Israel, and vice versa. The effort in the 1970s to define a rational basis for the standardization and control of postsecondary education after a decade of unplanned expansion is not unique to Israel or even to the educational sector. This is precisely what an institutional framework would predict (Meyer and Rowan 1977). More unique is the particular set of organizations which entered the new postsecondary institutional con-

text. In the Israeli case, these organizations had inconsistent and conflicting conceptions of postsecondary education in general and of the regional colleges in particular. Because of the historical circumstances in which the postsecondary sector grew up in Israel, the conceptions in conflict centered around egalitarianism access — a position represented by the Ministry of Education and regional authorities — and meritocratic access — a position represented by the universities and the Council for Higher Education. However, each of these bodies was unclear about the meaning of equality in postsecondary education, the balance between them, and the ways they should be justified. The regional colleges were caught in this conflict and found themselves on constantly shifting ground as they struggled to find identity and a basis for legitimacy.

Let us trace these shifts by analyzing the role of the major organizations in the emerging institutional context which surrounded the regional colleges. In the initial period of their formation, the regional colleges existed in a kind of "no-man's land." They would undoubtedly not have come into being without the initiative taken by the kibbutzim, which not only supplied know-how, experienced staff and students but legitimacy as well. But just as the kibbutzim withdrew from actively supporting the regional colleges, organizations on the national scene were beginning to define postsecondary education as a new concern. The development of the regional colleges from that point was intertwined with this concern.

In the meantime, the regional colleges received support form regional authorities, support that has remained stable throughout their history. Interested in providing more educational services to their populations and in bridging the gap between the center and the periphery in Israeli society, the regional authorities supported the colleges by allocating money and send-

ing students to the colleges. They did not enter actively into disputes about the basis for the colleges' legitimacy.

The role of national organizations was more variable. The Ministry of Education has faithfully supplied the colleges with about half of their budgets. It has also viewed the colleges in somewhat different ways according to shifts in its own general conceptions of educational policy. At first, it saw the colleges as serving local needs in a general way. Later, it thought of the regional colleges more specifically as sites for integrating poorly-educated students with better-educated students under the same roof. On this conception of equalizing access to postsecondary education, the presence of students from the kibbutzim was crucial. This meant that the Ministry of Education would be in favor of granting academic credit for some courses taught in the regional colleges to attract better-prepared students and to signify their academic respectability. While the Ministry of Education wanted to see the regional colleges authorized to operate as independent colleges, they did not press this issue in the face of opposition from the universities and ambivalence, at best, on the part of the Council for Higher Education.

The universities, whose stand on the regional colleges crystallized over the years, were ambivalent enough not to consitute a clear opposition. When Israeli higher education was expanding, the universities could afford to support the regional colleges through the provision of teachers, who benefited from moonlighting arrangements. Some of the universities, especially the newer, more Americanized ones, viewed their involvement with the regional colleges as a way of differentiating themselves from the older universities through the provision of services to under-served but academically qualified populations in the hinterland. But as student enrollments in the universities began to stabilize in the mid-1970s and as budgetary constraints began to

be felt, the universities viewed the colleges as potential competitors. University people saw the expansion of postsecondary education as an uncontrolled phenomenon that could only put them at a disadvantage in the competition for funds and students. New organizations which compete with more established organizations in the same domain have the most difficult time gaining legitimacy, and the regional colleges were no match for the universities. After a short-lived attempt to gain independence as academic institutions, the regional colleges opted for a safer role as university clients. As patrons, the universities could then moderate their opposition to the upstart colleges.

The Council for Higher Education was closely associated with the universities. A relatively new body when the regional colleges were founded, the Council in its early years took a laissez faire attitude toward the development of new academic institutions in Israel. Then, in 1972 when it became apparent that expansion had gone too far, the Council for Higher Education began to tighten up. One of the manifestations of this change was an amendment to the Council for Higher Education Law empowering the Council to license academic institutions.

In the Council's efforts to control postsecondary education, the regional colleges were vulnerable partly because they overlapped with the universities as comprehensive institutions, unlike teachers' training colleges, and partly because they held promise as competing centers for adult education. We have documented the ambiguous recommendations made by the numerous committees which met during the 1970s as they foundered on the challenge and promise of the regional colleges. The number of committees appointed to scrutinize the regional colleges is a leading indication of their significance in the emerging postsecondary institutional context. This reflects the basic struggle over

finding terms in which the regional colleges could be defined as legitimate educational organizations with a unique identity. The most serious critics of the regional colleges never publicly suggested that they be closed. They had the minimal virtue of already existing, for one thing. More important, they served underpriveleged populations high in the government's attention. Such attention could not be completly ignored, even by meritocrats in the universities and on the Council.

The legitimation of academic institutions rests with the granting of academic credit. Although no one organization in the institutional network had dominance overall, on this matter all of them deferred to the universities. When they did so, the regional colleges acquired a form of legitimation conditional on the willngness of the universities to provide courses to the colleges which carry academic credit: a borrowed legitimacy. As long as the universities continued to provide this halo, the regional colleges were free to carry on their business.

Conclusions

We have examined the antecedents and the processes involved in the institutionalization of an organization under conditions of conflict and inconsistency in the institutional context. These conflicts and inconsistencies were especially marked because the focal organization was a new and unfamiliar form and because the institutional context itself was in the process of formation. In organizations that touch on institutional sectors of society, the key to survival is achieving legitimacy. The key to legitimacy is recognition by prestigious organizations in the relevant institutional sector (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975). When other organizations in an institutionalized context are in conflict about what is legitimate, the focal organization may not be more free, as an exchange framework would predict. They may be less free:

even though they may have secure resources, they do not have a stable basis for survival, which depends on becoming institutionalized. We have seen how the leaders of the regional colleges constantly sought to find a basis for legitimacy. Rather than resisting the influence of other organizations, they actively looked for ways of gaining legitimacy through the support of those organizations that could provide them with it. This came at some cost by increasing scrutiny.

The struggle over the regional colleges was in large measure over who would define their legitimacy, under what conception of educational validity. We have seen some of the responses described at the beginning of this paper when organizations go through an institutionalizing process under conditions of conflict: (1) the incorporation of practices and procedures from the institutionalized sector, many of which may conflict with one another; (2) struggles over identity reflected in unclear boundaries; (3) increasing scrutiny; (4) loose coupling between the institutional and the operational realms. We have also seen that conflicts may not be resolved easily or finally. Indeed, one of the most important conclusions of the Israeli case is the extent to which conflicts over legitimacy not only shape the organization seeking it but also the organizations granting it.

Figure 1

General Characteristics of the Regional College Case

Characteristics of the Focal Organization

.Relatively new
.Several focal organizations
.Focal organizations dispersed
.Focal organizations uninfluential on external policy-making bodies
.Engaged in operations seen as unfamiliar in the larger society
.Outputs not easily measured
.Operations not market-driven
.Operations of various kinds brought together within the same organizational boundary

Resource System

.Resources relatively certain
.Two major resource givers, several minor resource givers
.Resource givers dispersed
.No clearly dominant resource givers

Relevant Institutional Context

.Five major organizations, several minor ones
.Each organization highly institutionalized within the larger society
.Relationships among these organizations relatively new and unformalized
.No clearly dominant organizations
.Inconsistencies and conflicts among major organizations' view of the focal organizations

Footnotes

1. The authors gratefully acknowledge the help of Micha Tal and Shmuel Daniv in providing us with documents and statistics. Comments on drafts of the paper from Shmuel Bendor were extremely helpful, as were those of John Meyer, Mayer Zald, Rosabeth Kanter, Seymour Spilerman, and Murray Edelman. Support for the project came from a University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School faculty research grant and the Szold Institute for Behavioral Science.

2. The research for this paper was conducted in Israel in the period 1977-1980 by the two authors. Interviews were conducted with directors and staff at five regional colleges, officials in the Ministry of Education involved in postsecondary education, the founding secretary of the Council for Higher Education, and the chairmen of three of the four committees mentioned in the text. Documents analyzed for this paper include the reports of these four committees, the report of the Central Committee of the colleges, and all minutes of the Council for Higher Education on the issue of the regional colleges from 1969 to 1978.

3. Teachers' training colleges enroll the largest number of students among the non-university colleges (11,732 in 1977-78), followed by colleges for practical engineers and technicians (7,133) and the regional colleges (5,776).

4. The role of private local initiative in founding the regional colleges resembles the U.S. pattern more than the Western European one (Carnegie Commission 1970).

5. This heterogeneity is, again, more like community colleges in the U.S. than those in other countries, whose programs tend to be more narrowly defined (Carnegie Commission 1970).

6. Just as these deliberations were going on, a new regional college was opened in 1975 in an educational center near Beersheba with academic courses taught by faculty from Ben-Gurion University, the newest university in Israel. Postsecondary education in Israel was not institutionalized yet!

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